

SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 27.

REPORT

ON THE

SANITARY CONDITION

OF THE

U. S. TROOPS IN THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY,

DURING

THE MONTH OF AUGUST.

BY J. S. NEWBERRY, M. D.,

Associate Secretary San. Commission.

Of the sanitary condition of the Federal forces in the Valley of the Mississippi, and the operations of the Sanitary Commission in that district during the month of August, I beg leave to submit the following report :

It gives me pleasure to state that the general sanitary condition of the troops is good ; at least very encouraging, considering their universal want of experience in camp life, and the hurried manner in which they have been congregated from widely separated sections of the country, and thrown into conditions of life as regards climate,

water, food, occupations and exposures, very different from that to which they had been accustomed. It is necessary to say, however, to this general rule there are some marked and instructive exceptions, to which I shall have occasion to allude hereafter.

The causes of this exemption from diseases so general among our troops, are doubtless somewhat complex ; but probably the most potent has been the marked healthfulness of the season. The weather has been cool and dry, and no epidemic has prevailed. Malarious fevers—the scourges of the Southwest—have been slow to develop themselves ; and although the season when they are usually most rife has not yet been reached, I think we may congratulate ourselves that our anticipations of the loss and suffering of our troops from this cause, are not likely to be realized.

Another and scarcely less efficient cause of the comparative healthfulness of most of the Western camps, may, I think, be truthfully said to be the very general appreciation of the value of sanitary regulations, and the promptness and energy with which both military and medical officers have accepted and enforced such wholesome rules for the preservation of the health of the men, as have been suggested by the officers or agents of the Sanitary Commission. And in this connection I must say that too much importance cannot be attached to the thorough inspection of the Western camps early in the season by our worthy President. The hints, rules, precepts and injunctions he then disseminated at Camp Dennison, Cairo, St. Louis, Alton, Caseyville, &c., have proved good seed on good ground, and have brought forth abundant fruit.

No epidemic is now prevailing among the Western troops

—most of the cases of disease being such as are incident to camp life everywhere. With better accommodations for the sick, larger experience on the part of officers and men, and a gratifying general observance of sanitary rules, these cases are becoming far less numerous and severe than earlier in the campaign. To such an extent is this true, that I think we have good grounds to hope, and even expect, that with energetic and judicious efforts toward that end, the fearful mortality of camp life in other wars may be in ours, not perhaps wholly escaped, but greatly reduced.

By the action of the Commission, our western field of labor has been divided into three districts, viz :

1st. The Western Mississippi, including Missouri and Iowa. 2d. The Eastern Mississippi, comprising Illinois, including Cairo and its vicinity, and Indiana. 3d. The Department of the Ohio, Western Virginia and Ohio.

The inspection of the camps in these districts has been entrusted respectively to Dr. W. P. Buel, whose headquarters are at St. Louis ; Dr. P. Aigner, stationed at Cairo, and Dr. C. D. Griswold, in Western Virginia, with a depot at Wheeling.

In accordance with the instructions of the Commission, these gentlemen have made frequent reports to me of the condition of the camps under their charge, and have notified me of the more urgent wants of the troops as they came to their knowledge. Such hospital stores as could not be obtained in time through other channels, I have been able to supply upon their requisitions.

From Dr. Buel I have no *detailed* report on the condition of the troops in Missouri, he himself having been sick and very much occupied. I gather from his letters, however,

that the health of the Federal forces in that State is generally quite good, though there is a want of hospital and medical stores, of ambulances, &c., for the current necessities of the army of occupation, and a much greater want of preparation for an epidemic of disease, or a general engagement.

The battle in which General Lyon was killed, found the medical department very imperfectly supplied with the hospital stores and accommodations required for the wounded. Of these, a large number were brought to St. Louis, and, as I have before stated, the hospital stores required in their treatment were supplied from Ohio and New York.

Dr. Buel expresses much concern at the entire want of ambulances in Missouri, but has submitted the matter to the consideration of General Fremont, who will perhaps see that this radical deficiency is supplied.

From Cairo I have frequent reports through Dr. Aigner. Of these, the first is so full and interesting that I take the liberty of transcribing a considerable portion of it.

1. "The forces stationed at Cairo and Bird's Point are in a state of transition, and almost constant change of position. The 'three months' men' went home just before my arrival, the 'cadres' of their regiments—consisting of officers and soldiers who re-enlisted for three years on the spot—remaining here to receive and drill the new recruits as they come in. Two of the most complete regiments have left permanently, as it seems, and gone up the river by order of Gen. Fremont. Of the remaining ones some are ordered across the river or back again, or to an advanced post or within the entrenchments, almost every other day to fulfil some military necessity or execute some strategical plan. You will see at once how unfavorable such a state of things

is for the collection of sanitary statistics or the carrying out of the suggestions of medical officers and the Sanitary Commission.

2. "The medical staff of the two brigades stationed at this post is composed of good men with very few exceptions. The medical director, Dr. Simmons, U. S. A. S., sent here by the Surgeon General to superintend the general and regimental hospitals, is a gentleman of large experience, fully alive to the importance of military hygiene, and imbued with the true spirit of reformation and improvement. Through his intervention the regimental surgeons and hospitals are supplied with everything they want in the shape of instruments, medicines, articles of hospital furniture, &c., with the exceptions mentioned further on.

3. "All the regiments, excepting the 18th Illinois Volunteers, Col. Lawlor, have, up to this time, been very fortunate in regard to their sanitary condition. Their loss in deaths has been very small, and a large proportion of these was caused by accidents. The 18th regiment, on the contrary, furnishes a sad illustration of the consequences of a neglect of hygienic measures. Their camp is the filthiest I have yet seen; its police entirely neglected, and the commanding officer pays, evidently, no attention to the suggestions of the medical director and the regimental surgeons, of whom he had a succession of five within as many weeks; it is, therefore, not to be wondered at, that the number of his men on the sick list amounts to-day to 209, in a force of 954.

4. "The hospitals, general as well as regimental, are mostly located in frame houses, not well adapted to such a purpose, or in tents within the entrenchments at Bird's Point, from 'military necessity;' but they are tolerably

well furnished, well kept, and well supplied, if we except mattresses, blankets, and such articles of food as have to be got by means of a hospital fund, or special requisition on the commissary. Very few volunteer regiments know how to get up a hospital fund, and even if they do they cannot convert their undrawn rations into such supplies as chickens, eggs, oranges, &c., without money in the hands of the commissary, and there is no money here in the hands of any officer.

5. "Several ladies' associations of Chicago, Springfield, and Quincy have sent on supplies of wines, jellies, and other luxuries, to be distributed to the sick in the different hospitals. Unfortunately, patients in hospitals where lady nurses are not admitted by the surgeons, are excluded from the benefits of these associations.

6. "In most of the hospitals, patients have no mattresses or bed blankets. Requisitions for these articles have been made, and a sufficient supply is daily expected from St. Louis. Bed writing tables and slippers are a great desideratum, and, as they will not be furnished by government, the Commission is requested to send some here, if able to do so.

7. "There is not a single regiment here which is in possession of an ambulance, and but very few are provided with field stretchers. The Medical Director tells me, however, that requisitions have been made for them, and that a sufficient number will arrive within a few days.

8. "The men of all the regiments are well fed on fresh meat and bakers' bread, the rations being of amply sufficient quantity and good quality. Their clothing is, on the contrary, very poor, uniforms not being furnished at all, blankets, stockings, underclothes, and shoes not in sufficient

quantity and of very poor quality. The appearance of the men is, therefore, almost shocking to a military eye, and the approaching cool season will find them ill prepared if the requisitions for these articles are not soon filled.

9. "The prevailing diseases are : intermittent and remitting fevers, bowel complaints, colds, rheumatism, and typhoid fever. The number of the first might be reduced by the use of quinine as a prophylactic. I have advocated this practice, which hitherto has been entirely neglected, in my conversations with the regimental surgeons, and hope to see it soon adopted by the great majority of them. Bowel complaints are on the decrease among the acclimated portion of the troops, and might be still further reduced by the general adoption of the habit of wearing flannel body bandages or stomach belts, of which there is a large number in the hands of Mrs. Yates, the deputy of Miss Dix. The surgeons have, up to this time, paid too little attention to the importance of this precaution. In newly-arrived men, nothing seems to be able to prevent the omnivorous diarrhœa of Cairo, which, fortunately, is not very difficult to control. The sale of unwholesome fruit is now prohibited in nearly all the camps, but soldiers on leave of absence will help themselves to unripe peaches, green apples, &c."

At the request of the Commission, I employed an inspector (Dr. C. D. Griswold) to visit the camps and hospitals in Western Virginia.

The report which he has made of his tour of inspection is quite full, and such as probably gives a fair representation of the health of the troops, the sanitary condition of the camps, the state of the hospitals as regards cleanliness, and the quality and quantity of hospital and medical stores on hand.

From this report it is evident that prompt action is demanded on the part of the General and Ohio State governments, to correct the abuses and supply the deficiencies which are seen to exist.

There is also a pressing call for such aid as the Sanitary Commission can afford ; and I would respectfully suggest that an inspector be kept on duty in this district, and that a permanent depot of supplies be established at Wheeling, Virginia.

The necessity for these measures will, I think, be seen from the following extracts from the introduction to the report of Dr. Griswold :

“In submitting the accompanying Reports of Camps and Hospitals, which I have visited by your instructions, it seems necessary to observe—

“1st. I have everywhere been treated with the kindest consideration, and the fullest respect and appreciation of the labors of the Sanitary Commission, under which I have acted, have been expressed by Brig. Gen. Rosecrans and Col. Hewes, of Clarksburgh; by Brig. Gen. Kelly, of Grafton, and by the surgeons of the various posts. General Rosecrans had the kindness to note in my memorandum book the stations in the Department of the Ohio, which he desired to have under the surveillance of an agent of the Commission ; and Gen. Kelly expressed a desire that such agent should make Grafton his headquarters.

“2d. The deficiencies so fully noted in the accompanying reports are not, that I could learn, the result of indifference on the part of the officers in command respecting the health and comfort of their men, but rather from the hasty manner in which so large a force has been called into the field, and the inexperience so general among those who have been

called to act regarding the necessities of camp life and hospital organization.

“3d. The surgical instruments and medicines supplied by the Purveyor at Cincinnati, are not of uniform good quality, and not well selected,—some articles in over abundance, and often deficiencies in the most common necessities.

Peruvian bark (red) is very essential to restore the digestive powers of the convalescent, yet it is nowhere furnished. Labaroque’s Solution, I found, had been furnished in small quantity at one station, but nowhere did I find chloride of lime, or even quick-lime, which should be kept by every Quartermaster. Necessary articles for cleanliness and comfort—such as bed chambers with covers spout cups, spittoons, and even candlesticks—are required at every station or hospital I visited. Mops and brushes for wet and dry scrubbing with sand, are unknown. The expectorated matter upon the floors at the hospital at Clarksburgh, from patients with bronchial affections, rendered my stay in the wards intolerable.

“4th. No means did I find anywhere for the bathing, or even general washing of patients in or on entering the hospital.

“6th. Application is frequently made by young women who desire to be employed in the hospitals as nurses, and Gen. Kelly desired that this might be accomplished. The moral effect upon the sick would be most salutary, and discipline could much better be enforced, for no human heart could knowingly disregard the order and decorum necessary for the occupancy of the female who seeks by her own hands to make comfortable the sick.

“6th. Suspending coal oil lamp with ground shades

should be furnished every hospital to light the wards and halls. Safety and economy demand this provision.

“7th. The period of my visit to Western Virginia was very unfavorable for the inspection of camps, inasmuch as the army was moving forward, and therefore constantly changing position. I found much difficulty in obtaining statistical information, and would urge the adoption of more system and accuracy in the hospital records.”

In regard to the condition of the camps in the interior of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, of which no report has been given by our inspectors, I am able to state that very few troops at present occupy their camps. Regiments are recruiting at a great number of points, but as fast as organized and equipped, they are hurried off to join the forces of General Fremont and General Rosecrans. While in this nascent state, little has been possible in the way of the improvement of their sanitary condition. I am happy to be able to state that the law passed at the last session of Congress, providing for the organization of boards for the examination of Surgeons and Assistant Surgeons in all the States, has been carried into effect in all the Western States; and the surgeons now receiving commissions are generally men of reputable character and good professional ability.

To their surgeons a large number of the documents of the Commission have been sent; and it is hoped they will early take a decided stand in the enforcement of sanitary rules in the camps and among the troops under their care.

In addition to the inspection of camps, much has been done in the West during the past month in supplying the want, most severely felt in Missouri and Western Virginia, of hospital stores, lint, bandages, sheets, shirts, drawers, slippers, &c., &c., and articles of diet for the soldiers, not

included in the rations supplied to them, such as pickles, dried fruit and vegetables, and arrowroot, cornstarch, jellies and canned fruits for the sick.

In Missouri the pressing want of hospital stores, felt immediately subsequent to the engagement near Springfield, was fully supplied by the contributions of the Woman's Central Association of Relief, of New-York, and the Ladies of the Soldiers' Aid Society, of Cleveland. In Western Virginia, the government machinery for the supply of hospital and medical stores has but recently been put in motion ; and the hospitals at Oakland, Clarksburgh and Grafton, as well as those of the regiments stationed farther South and East, at Beverly, Summerville, &c., have been and still are greatly in want of many of the articles most essential to the health and comfort of the sick. These wants have, however, been in part supplied by the liberal contributions of the ladies of Northern Ohio ; and it is probable that all necessary extraneous aid will be furnished from the same source.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

J. S. NEWBERRY.